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ON BEING TOO HIGHBROW

By K. M. Baxter

That is what people say we are: you, dear reader, and I. Our Celtic blood rushes of course to respond violently—a word and a blow. But remembering our manners just in time let us analyse these hard words and see what our critics really mean.

By classic definition, Highbrow means " one educated beyond his natural capacity ". In current usage it has come to mean " any person who makes me feel (*a*) ignorant, (*b*) lacking in taste, and (*c*) (consequently) furious ".

But apparently, there are degrees of highbrowism, and if one can be too highbrow there must be a point which is highbrow but not *too*, if you see what we mean ?

Now obviously neither you (dear reader) nor I, will agree that any amount of education could be beyond our natural capacity : at school, our I.Q. was away up beyond our fellows, was it not ? So that any quantity of education could only have been beneficial. Alternatively, m'Lud, defendant claims he has received no education at all beyond that provided by the state, and owes everything to his own innate genius.

What can they mean ? Can they mean that we have our own private scale of values—private standards by which (human nature being what it is) we judge as excellent those works we would like to have written ourselves, Shakespeare, Racine, the Book of Job, as next best those we have in fact written and as quite hopeless any which put forward views we don't agree with. This would be a possible interpretation, and literary and dramatic cliques have flourished on just

these lines before now, tho' their life has generally been brutish and brief. And it was (Yes, we got this out of the Third Programme, so that 's a mark against us)—or wasn't it?—Montaigne who said that religious beliefs promote dissension precisely in proportion to the intensity with which they are held. If he did, or if that is anyhow true, we should expect to find violent dissension within the Religious Drama Society, and should indeed be encouraged by its presence. In fact, there is hardly enough.

However, we are going to consider to-day the allegation (one of several that underlies this statement) that we aren't providing, in the words of one critic, " simple inspirational plays for parish use " and, when one goes further into it, that we are in fact turning down for publication plays written by devout souls aiming at just that use. " A Yes, a Yes, to both." On both counts, m'Lud, accused pleads guilty and reserves his defence.

We have failed to provide enough suitable plays for parish use, and we have failed because we haven't found enough that come up to our standards. We have provided some as our lists show. And here are some of the standards by which we try to judge those submitted.

1. Does this play speak of God's ways with men ?
2. Does it speak clearly, out of deep conviction, or muddledly out of convictions insufficiently tested ?
3. Does it add to the story already available in other forms—or is it just a re-hash ?
4. Does it speak in the language of the people for, or about, whom it is ostensibly written ?
5. Is it a play that depends wholly on production, or is it one where the printed word really is a safe guide to those who might use it ?
6. Has it qualities of devotion or of beauty, or fresh interpretation, that make all the foregoing questions quite irrelevant ?
7. Is it a play ?

1. Does it speak of God's ways with men ? You would be surprised, dear reader, at how many plays called " Religious " have nothing whatever to do with God. Quite interesting versions of Old Testament stories for instance, throwing quite a lot of light on customs, traditions, geography, and chronology have come our way, wherein was no trace whatever of History's being conceived in terms of God's dealings with man : and the same is true of quite a number of plays about good works, where it is all too easy to say " This can be paralleled by stories of purely humanistic endeavours which don't take Grace into account at all ".

2. Does it speak clearly, out of deep conviction ? Too often as one reads plays submitted one asks, " What made the author want to write this ? With what fire is he burning ? What has he heard in the night that he must tell forth in the day ? " Sometimes one is forced to

answer " Nothing : he has nothing to say ". Sometimes, however, one sees, Yes, there is something he wants to say, but he simply hasn't the technical skill. It is as if you and I who have never handled a violin should say, " Listen, this is the melody that has been haunting my dreams this month past," and try to reproduce it, with our scraping bow and our entangled fingers. And then there is the third writer of this sort to whom has come a kind of lightning-flash of apprehension in which he has assented to Christian Truth, and feels, quick, he must speak of what he knows. But, of course, he doesn't know it, not in his bones. Only in his head, or his heart, or his liver: because he hasn't let the conviction breed and burn and die and live again in him, trying it against all the stresses of his life, till like a practised boxer, he stands to it so lightly, so firmly, so adaptably, that you can't knock him off balance come at him from whatever corner you will.

3. Does it add to the story already available ? There are innumerable Nativity plays. Does this one present the Eternal Story in some way that makes some aspect of it specially comprehensible to our time ? We have read many versions of St. Peter's escape from prison. Does this, for example, really make us conscious of our own close link with the primitive Church, or does it only intensify our feeling of " long, long ago ". If it *does* add to the story, we have further to examine closely whether the additions are, scripturally and doctrinally, acceptable. You would again be surprised (d.r.) at some of the tenets attributed to SS. Peter and Paul by the devout but ill-instructed playwright. (The answer to this one is of course easy: *avoid New Testament stories*! But it is nevertheless remarkable how much of new light shines thro' a simple humble attentiveness to even the best known of the Bible stories. It is not we but Dante who gives as the recipe for great writing, that writers should be of those " who when Love speaks, *attend* ".)

4. Does it speak in the language of the people for or about whom it is ostensibly written ?

Plays designed for Club use are sometimes dire offenders and we particularly cherish the following dialogue, culled from one such play.

Roman Centurion. Where art thou off to ?

Jewish boy. Me ? What 's that to you ?

Old Man. When shall we purge us of these Foreign Swine ?

Boy. Come along, father, take no notice of him.

Here the appalling jumble of styles out-Bottoms Moonshine. But equally disastrous effects can be obtained when the middle-aged elect to write dialogue for modern youth, with every catch phrase just twenty years off key, " ripping " for " wizard " or " posh " for " just the job " and so on. The falsity of the dialogue sheds a phoney light over the whole conception of the piece.

5. Is it a play that depends wholly on production, or is the printed word a safe guide ?

Now here we come upon a very difficult question. Particularly in versions of Bible stories which set out deliberately to do something new is there a difficulty. Given skill and devotion and a real understanding of the spiritual truths which underlie the treatment, a play daring to the last extreme may be moving to an extent no conventional treatment would be, but we do think twice about these, knowing how shattering, how blasphemous they become if they fall into the hands of a producer who lacks either the control to safeguard his Company's reverence, or the spiritual insight to see where the dangers lie. I don't think we've turned one down—we get all too few, but we might have to: and ask for the script in typescript only for use by experienced producers!

The last two questions are seldom asked because they have usually been answered long before one reaches them, but when a play arrives which has in it some stirring life of its own, some " news from a foreign country ", it would I think almost soften the heart of our critics to see the quite unhighbrow joy that runs through the office and out to the country telephone exchanges where R.D.S. readers ply their busy spectacles. We really do rejoice if any one who is a writer will let us look at a play that has cost him some of his life blood, and in addition is a piece of true *dramatic* writing, and not a set of sermons however finely constructed. By dramatic writing we mean writing where the attention of the audience is held by the impact of will on will. We aren't asking for the " well-made play ", nor for a melodrama packed with incident. But, in dramatic writing something must happen to the chief *characters*; when the play finishes they must not be the same people they were when it began. Many religious dramas show no development of character at all. M'Lud, if by highbrow is meant " demanding the best for the service of the Highest ", accused is proud to plead guilty. In our submission, m'Lud, the word " too " is inadmissible in this context.

The defence rests, m'Lud.

M'Lud. I object. And the objection is this and it 's frequent and it 's understandable. " Our Vicar wrote a Nativity play, and we did it last year. The congregation packed the church and there is no doubt that the devotional life of the caste was deepened by the experience. People who came from outside the parish were deeply moved and after some hesitation the Vicar was persuaded to send the play up to R.D.S.—but they wouldn't have it." It 's all perfectly true, like the story of Elisha and the Bear.[1] He did, they did, it did. And the action of R.D.S. is only misunderstood because the Vicar just is a bit too much of a saint to know what he does, or what is done through him to his little team of players and the congregation who comes to watch them. He has been able to inspire his friends and parishioners with a part of his vision, much more by what he is than by what he has written and they in their turn have been able, tho' they're not technically skilful,

[1] Howling schoolchild's essay : " Elisha said to the children, if you go on being rude I shall send a bear from the woods to eat you up. So they did, so he did, so it did."

to communicate what has been happening to them during the rehearsals. So that the play, prayed about and produced as an act of devotion, has in truth a life beyond its own, and the people who see it are quite genuinely moved by it.

It is one of the peculiar joys of doing a Nativity play that this happens—over and over again. But—do you remember the bright pebbles, the delicate shells, the brilliant weed you used to collect on the sea shore? How lovely, how strange, how rare when you picked them up still wet and gleaming from the sea: how dreary, stale, flat, and unprofitable when turned out of your pocket in the digs later in the evening.

So with such plays as these when they come in cold typescript to the office; so, only more so, when they appear privately printed on cheap paper with a photograph of the caste as frontispiece. Whither is fled the visionary gleam? It 's gone, dear reader. It was, truly, there once. But it was in the heart, not in the pen, and the heart may indite of good matters and yet they may not be for publication. It 's only a play by a man or woman with real literary gifts as well as a wider vision than most, that will stand up to printing, and what he has to say must be valid for more than just the small circle of parish or school or community, however good (and some are very good indeed) the play may be for that small circle.

But the smaller work has value. It has indeed. It lays the foundations: it trains the actors, it rears up an audience accustomed to religious drama as an activity of Church life. But it must be content to stay in typescript.

And when people say to you " but R.D.S. turned down my play, tho' everyone said it was good and exactly what was needed ", say to them: " Fine! That shows the standard's going up. They couldn't have afforded to turn you down three years back; but you'll write another next year, won't you? " And if the author goes on to say " But how are the little earnest plays written in such love and faith going to see the light if R.D.S. won't publish them? " your answer is easy. " They *have* seen the Light." That's all that matters.

GOOD OFFICES

As we go to press the Office is being moved from its well-known " compact residence " into " spacious quarters " conveniently divided into three sections—library, secretarial, and inner refuge containing R.D.S. secretary. This improvement in our lebenstraum is only one visible sign of the change in our relationship with S.P.C.K. (*See R.D.S. News and Notices.*)

This is the second of two articles on Charles Williams.

SPIRIT OR GOBLIN

By Douglas Remington

> " Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned
> Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell . . .
> Thou comest in such questionable shape
> That I will speak to thee. . . ."

It was Mr. T. S. Eliot who said of Charles Williams, " At ease in human society, I am sure he would have remained equally composed if a ghost, an angel or an evil spirit had entered the room. He would have known how to receive any kind of supernatural visitor, for he took the other world as simply as this one ".[1]

Those who knew him must surely confirm this verdict on Williams. Few people of the modern age can have lived so manifestly " in the heavenlies ". In the words of Br. George Every, " If he heard the expression ' realized eschatology ', it was at the very end of his life; but he had the idea at the very beginning of his poetry."[2] His life expressed the theme " Heaven (and Hell) lies about us " as clearly as his writings. His constant references in ordinary conversation to " grace ", " holy love ", " the brethren of the City ", were not the embarrassing pious ramblings of the religious enthusiast, but the natural expression of the clear, crisp, concise knowledge that he had of the subjects of eternal life here and now. He had a remarkable and detailed perception of those concepts to which most of us refer only with the vaguest and woolliest idea of what they mean. " Glory " to him was a blaze—not a blur : " redemption " for him was an active function of the Omnipotence—not a theological term to be debated in the schools: the City was a reality, standing four-square—not a mere figure of speech, imperfectly defined. He regarded it as his duty to question the Almighty's actions although he always expected the answer given to Job which he paraphrased " Where were you when I made the hippopotamus ? " In all this " Affirmation of Images " he stood as a leader of his contemporaries, an elder among the Companions of the Co-inherence to whom the Parousia is not a distant event but a present reality.

Yet all this is not to say that he lived with his head in the clouds or that he was in any way out of touch and sympathy with earthly things. Indeed it is the wonder of his life that this was not so, and his greatness lies in the fact that his occupation with the Transcendence did not cloud his vision of the Immanence. For he was soundly attached to earthly concerns as a reading of his novels will show. The point is that he would not permit a dichotomy. If it becomes necessary to the

[1] *The Listener*, December 19th, 1948.

[2] *Theology*, April, 1948.

divine action a heavenly creature may use a telephone (All Hallow's Eve), an Angel and a devil may play at dice (The House by the Stable) and an earthly body " under the Protection " may travel backwards through time and return (Many Dimensions).

His most exciting supernatural adventures are set against the most ordinary natural background, and this is parabolic of Williams the man. For there was nothing out of the ordinary about the man whom I knew for a year or two at Oxford and met, more briefly, shortly before his death, at a theological college at Lincoln. Short, grey-haired, peering through thick-lensed spectacles, invariably plainly dressed in a sober suit, he bore little resemblance to the conventional caricature of the modern poet. Not that he could not be caricatured. Nervous, excitable, a chain-smoker, his voice marred by a harsh accent, nothing could be more bathetic than the attempts he sometimes made to show us how he meant his lovely lines to be spoken. But there the comedy and his ordinariness ended. His genius declared itself in the power of the images he created or affirmed and the strength of his language in expressing them. He was as vigorous in his private conversation as in his poetry. Once, playing a part in his unpublished " Terror of Light " I was very uncertain of his characterization of St. Thomas, and well remember pacing an Oxford lawn the whole afternoon through while he gripped my attention thoroughly with his exhaustive vision expressed in the creation of this one not very important character in his play.

The criticism most frequently levelled at Charles Williams' work is that it is obscure. This was a charge that Williams never denied, but no more did he defend his verses' obscurity. If people were able to understand his poetry, good: he was satisfied, he expected them to understand. If people were not able to understand his poetry he didn't mind; he certainly wasn't going to be troubled to explain it to them or to bring out annotated editions for use in schools. There the poetry was and there it stood. To this extent Williams was intolerant, but such intolerance need not imply, as Mr. Ward suggests that it does, an absence of *caritas*. It may rather imply humility; Williams rated his own intelligence no higher than that of his readers, and was baffled and silenced when they failed to comprehend.

It is true that, to the ordinary mind, a certain amount of Williams must remain incomprehensible, but the greater part of his work will become more readily understood when it is reviewed against a background of the images that he was most concerned to affirm. First, the subject nearest his heart and his mind was the Doctrine of Exchange. Contrary to the opinion of certain critics this Doctrine as he expressed it goes no further than the writings of St. Paul, but, on the other hand, he is probably the first person in 500 years to have expressed it with such clarity and force. Starting from the premise that it is always possible to " bear one another's burdens " since we are exhorted to do so, he follows the logic through to its conclusion and finds no circumstance to which the full exchange and substitution cannot be adapted. All this is so clear in his writing and was, I believe, amply expressed

practically in his life. This " exchange " appears in many of his plays but for the simplest understanding of it we must look to his novels. Perhaps the most powerful and striking substitutions are in " All Hallows' Eve ", when the doctrine is carried so far as to enable the exchange between the living and the dead. Throughout this substitution theory he maintains a kind of dialectic between the supernatural and the magical.

In any examination of this part of Williams' teaching, I believe a certain fundamental feature has been ignored. It is the fact that, since this gripping belief in the Doctrine of Exchange was so much a feature of Williams' life and writing, it was inevitable that he should turn his attention to the world of the theatre where the Doctrine of Substitution has perhaps its fullest earthly meaning. And because his teaching of exchange derived directly from Our Lord in a procession through Milton, Dante, and St. Paul, it was natural that his work should be almost entirely related to the Religious Theatre. This is perhaps one of the most operative reasons why the R.D.S. should be so interested in Charles Williams and why, for his part, he has such a contribution to make to the Society.

It is impossible within the space of a short article to treat of his other great themes. They will, however, amply reward those who dig deep down into them. The City, the Accuser, the Theology of Romantic Love, are all themes of Williams' which he developed to the benefit of Theology, the Theatre and that combination of the two which concerns him and us.

I cannot but feel that Mr. Ward's accusation against Charles Williams of Apollinarianism itself savours of Adoptianism. No one could persist in this charge who had read *He came down from Heaven.* Charles William's Christology, there clearly expressed, is that of the Athanasian Creed. That his emphasis was on the phrase " not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by the taking of manhood into God " ensures his orthodoxy. He refers to this quotation as " a phrase which is the very maxim of the Affirmative Way . . . it is the actual manhood which is to be carried on, and not the height which is to be brought down " (*Descent of the Dove*, p. 59). The conclusion to be drawn from Williams' writings is that his Saviour as his salvation was of both worlds.

A final reminiscence. The last time I met Charles Williams was a few months only before his death. He had been invited to give the Passion Week Lectures at the Bishop's Hostel at Lincoln and forty theological students were gathered round him in the Library, only a few of us knowing the sort of thing we were likely to expect, and we knowing only dimly that it would be remarkable. He began this series of meditations on Our Lord's Passion and Crucifixion with the words characteristically paradoxical " Death is an outrage ". It was not that the psychosomatic union was any mystery to him. His concern was that man should have so outraged this union that death became necessary as a break in life. How we must agree, privately and selfishly, when his death, untimely as it was, has taken from us one of the greatest Christian dramatists of our age, who led the field in the difficult formative years when few would tackle the task.

IN SWEDEN

The position of religious drama in Sweden has been somewhat complicated by the fact that most free church opinion utterly condemns attendance at theatres or even cinemas, and that even in the Church of Sweden there is deep-rooted suspicion of drama to be overcome. This has made the path of the pioneers of religious drama thorny, and meant that they have had to be both bold and cautious.

One of those who has done most in this direction is the Vicar of St. John's Church in Stockholm, the Rev. Erik Arbin. He gained some experience of the possibilities of dramatic presentation through a series of social evenings which he organized for block after block of his industrial city parish, all the people living in one block inviting all the people living in the next block to an evening to get to know one another—the invited block being host in its turn for a new block at the next session. During this series of social evenings, a former communist stage-manager, who had just been converted to Christianity, came to Mr. Arbin and offered his services. In conjunction with the Vicar, Mr. Herman Greid produced a number of tableaux and sketches suitable for evenings of this rather original kind.

It became obvious that the method was worth pursuing, and after the end of the series of meetings, Mr. Greid and Mr. Arbin began presenting plays in St. John's Church. They have followed the principle that in these dramatic presentations in the wide chancel, only the words of Scripture are used, the rest of the action taking place in expressive and suggestive silence.

Another dramatist who is experimenting in this field is the Rev. Anders Frostenson. His first play *Going their own Ways* tells the story of a modern family where the husband, a taxi-driver, is converted to Christianity, and the wife is unable to follow him. This play has been presented on a number of secular stages in Stockholm and elsewhere under the management of Mr. Herman Greid. Mr. Frostenson's St. Francis play *Registered Letter from Assisi*, where the action takes place stereoscopically in the lives of St. Francis and a present-day postman with simultaneous interaction, is accepted for presentation in Sweden's most modern theatre in Malmö.

Mr. Lennart Bernadotte, a cousin of the late Count Folke Bernadotte, is another of those who have pioneered with old mystery plays in church. And the Rev. Olof Hartman is experimenting with religious drama on the Swedish wireless.

Perhaps the briefest commentary on the reception which religious drama is receiving in Sweden to-day is that when the writer of this article went to see these plays, the first two times he was turned away from the doors of overcrowded churches up to half an hour before the performance was due to begin. Later he got into church once and a big entertainment auditorium once, to find himself part of huge crowds of people, many of whom probably never went to church in the ordinary course of events.

The report printed below, though couched in terms of a single production, has such wide significance as a report on a total situation that we have no hesitation in presenting it as an article, and not as news from a branch.

MINORITY SPEAKING

By Derek Tasker

The parish of St. Stephen's, Southmead, lies to the north of the city of Bristol. Sprawls rather than lies—that would be nearer the mark. Its population hovers around the 25,000's and two-thirds of the parish consists of a housing estate. It is a city on its own, without any of the facilities that the modern city offers—an estate without shops, without halls, without cinemas, without pubs, even without the Co-op. A distressingly common phenomenon of post-war Britain, a body without a soul.

Which, of course, was one of the reasons why the Bishop of Bristol asked us to put on *Go Down Moses*—an experiment to graft some sort of a soul on to the frantically undernourished body. We have a Church of course, in the primitive sense of the word, a smallish remnant, redoubtable in courage, persevering in devotion. The man or woman who will be an open Christian in this sort of parish is nearly always good stuff: the going's too hard for any but the strong in faith to survive. I say " smallish ", for we are but a tiny minority—perhaps a couple of hundred who take God seriously. The kind of people who think it just as important to go to the Parish Communion on Trinity V as on Christmas Day.

We hoped that *Go Down Moses* would make our family life more coherent, intensify the reality of our existence as a corporate body. It did that—superbly it drew us together, and most of us *were* a little stodgy and formal in our relationships. It was just this kind of experience that we needed to create a sense of belonging to one another as well as to God. Just this kind of experience that made us grow in a sense of our missionary vocation as the Body of Christ. Friendships were made, friendships that will be spiritually fruitful and not only to those drawn together by them. We invited the co-operation of the whole congregation. If they could help in no other way, they could help in the most practical way of all—on their knees. There was a lot of prayer going on in hidden places, not least on Sunday mornings when we remembered our venture and offered it as part of our oblation, that God might take us and use us to show something of His truth and of His grace in this wilderness. Whilst there were, I believe, few who did not pray with us, there were some who could assist behind the scenes. Costumes appeared miraculously out of sackcloth, and perhaps it was only a coincidence that the Vicar's waste-paper sack, kindly loaned by a beneficent Corporation, disappeared about this time. Whilst Martha plied needle and thread, her spiritual brother got busy with wires and fuses and a magnificent spot-light contraption

(proudly we announced in the programme our gratitude to the Bristol Old Vic.).

Not that rehearsals—spread unevenly over three months—ever gave hope of academic triumph. The city Fathers, in their wisdom, provide the residents of a housing estate with four walls, a roof, and a patch of stoney soil decorated with broken bottles—together with permission to instal " Rediffusion ". And there it ends. But we—by the prescience of our forefathers—were luckier than some : we inherited a Hall, planted on the " respectable " fringe of the estate, part of the endeavour to build a brave, new world after 1918. Not lovely to look at, of course, a little chilly in January with more windows out than in, but *once* it seated ninety-four clammy bodies on an August evening. Somehow we managed to rehearse in " The Blue Triangle ". Meanwhile, with episcopal prodding, a stage was being created for *Go Down Moses* by contractors not a little conscious of the fact that the new Hall they had promised by Christmas, 1948, was still, in February, without a roof. When we saw the stage, we felt atonement was complete.

And the players ? For most of them, this was a new experience. They were amateurs in the real sense of the word. A youngish lot, with no one yet in their forties, and a predominant number from the Youth Club. One father of four, himself only just in the thirties, a couple of very young mothers, and lots of courting couples ! A thoroughly representative crowd, but not the easiest of material for producer Pamela Keily to work on. Behind them there was a quite invaluable group of stage-hands.

Moses was produced on four occasions at the end of March. We hired a Boys' Club, erected our own fairy-tale of a stage, and just managed to find seating accommodation for 150. We had no difficulty in filling the " room ": to call it a hall would be a euphemism. We even made a financial profit. And of course those who came enjoyed it. I think they were quite amazed at what could be done. The Headmaster of the local Secondary school said to me, " I've waited ten years to see Southmead put on something like this. I knew they would do it, and now they have." A neighbouring Vicar was so impressed that he came every night. Even quite young children came, and were quiet and absorbed some of its meaning. As one of them said to me next day, just after Evensong, as the folk were coming out of Church, " Look, sir, there 's Satan. Fancy him going to Evening-song ! "

I have one doubt in my mind. The proportion of those who came to see *Moses* who were outside of organized religion was microscopic, and their appreciation was purely intellectual. Maybe that 's our fault. But I doubt personally whether this kind of play in this kind of language is going to make any impact, say, upon dockers on strike. I don't know. But I do know that *Moses* deepened the devotion of all those who took part—incalculably—and it was infinitely worth while because it has made them, nearly all of them, more determined to fulfil St. Teresa's definition of the end of man, " to love Jesus *and to make Him loved.*

NEWS OF THE OTHERS

STAR TURNS

Iona. The Iona Youth Trust sends us an account of their recent production, *The Port*, and a postscript about their activities in the streets!

Yes, *The Port* had a lot to do with Christian work. The idea of creating a play with shipyard workers in Port Glasgow was first suggested by the Rev. Harold Whitley. He saw a demonstration of ours in Community House, and he said, " Why don't you come down to the Yards in Port Glasgow and try the same thing with the men there. There 's some bitterness between the men and the management—legacies of the Depression—and if they got together to write a play about these problems, they could at least talk to each other rationally on common ground." Mr. Whitley could see a great place for this method in his self-imposed job of reconciliation between different elements in Port Glasgow. I went down without the least knowledge of the shipyard problems, or the men, and I think I visualized heated meetings in one of the Yard sheds in an atmosphere of vigorous rancour and tobacco. The reality proved to be a neat room, in Lithgows Welfare Club overshadowed by the outside cranes and the tenements. The men who came along were rivetters, platers, caulkers, and so on, with some of the office staff. Gradually their deeper feelings were expressed, " My grandfather and Sir James Lithgow's grandfather worked in the Yards together, had the same standing. Sir James's grandfather made a bit of money and became a manager, than an owner. Now Sir James is a great man and I'm exactly in the same position as my grandfather . . . it 's all part of the game I suppose " . . . " I don't believe in nationalism and international quarrels . . . we're all in the same world, aren't we. . . ." " It 's like it says in the Bible, here we get seven lean years and seven fat years." . . . " When are we going to get an improvement in the machinery ? Some of it is years out of date causing hardship and danger." . . . " Work in the shipyards is the greatest in the world. You can glory in it when you realize what it 's all for." . . . " But why is it that prosperity on the Clyde seems to rely on war or the threat of war. We don't want that kind of work. We want work that is constructive . . ."—and so on. They included with their deeper feelings seemingly more trivial matters which yet raised a storm of discussion—snobbery from the office workers to the outside workers—differences of pay for piece work and time work. The manager of the Yards joined the group and then Sir James Lithgow. The holders of different points of view hit out at each other pretty hard, but it was honest and unsentimental talk, and these discussions had perhaps the greatest value in all the venture. They had also some actual effect on the methods of work in the Yards.

Having had few preconceived ideas about what they were going to do as a dramatic group, they had taken most readily to the idea of writing a play; and they now suggested that their writing should be firmly rooted in the history of Port Glasgow. There was a boy from an Orphanage in the group working as an apprentice engineer, and his matter-of-fact and yet moving account of his own experiences gave them the idea of writing the play through this boy's eyes, as it were, and through his experiences, real and imaginary, with members of a Port Glasgow family, by whom he had been adopted. There were many more discussions now about the plot of the play. Girls from the office joined the group at this point. The manager came to all the meetings, and Sir James Lithgow came at regular intervals. The writing of the script started, and the method was the usual cross-fire of criticism directed at individual efforts which were re-written until satisfactory. Finally, a kind of dramatic diary of Port Glasgow, between the years 1929 to 1945 emerged, centring on the orphan and the Port Glasgow family, and with a simple plot to carry the events along. They were conscientious about writing the scripts, not till the very end of their three-act play did

the writing begin to flag, but then they found the last two scenes—the shortest in the play—the most difficult to write. The play was now completed and was given a dramatic reading; and then christened *The Port.*

At this point the Rev. George Wilkie, a young man of twenty-six, was appointed as shipyard chaplain to the Yards, and he saw this experiment as part of his work. He took over the production of the play, and produced two scenes from it. The group were now rather jittery about their efforts in writing and in acting, and the rest of the town was frankly sceptical. These two scenes, however, made such an impression on the townspeople who saw it that we all decided that the play must be produced. George Wilkie produced it and brought many more people into the group—because the cast was a large one. He also organized the making of scenery and properties within the Yard itself. Very many different kinds of people within the Yards were now involved, and even the Darts Club of Lithgows Welfare Centre was brought in to be a " crowd ".

Finally, the full production was put on in the Town Hall. There was considerable humour in the dialogue and from the very start the play seemed to click in the minds of the audience. They revelled in seeing their own people, the people of Port Glasgow, on the stage in a story which seemed to grow out of the very houses and yards surrounding them. On the second night, two hundred and fifty people had to be turned away for lack of accommodation. They are now clamouring for repeat performances.

The play, seen by an average member of an audience, wouldn't seem to be obvious religious drama, and yet the experiment is obviously Christian work. A minister inspired the idea, the work of creating the play was done by methods developed in Community House, the experimental centre of the Church of Scotland; and the play was produced by the shipyard Chaplain. As an experiment, it has proved worth while.

P.S.—Last Saturday we did something that would interest you—plays in the streets, acted on a lorry through microphones. It was an attempt to counteract the apathy in the municipal elections here, and we toured around—a fantastic sight!—the streets of Glasgow, all the players in costume on a lorry with the scenery set up and bending to the wind as we gathered speed. It was quite easy to get a crowd, as you could imagine. The numbers grew as the play progressed and towards the end, when Dr. MacLeod spoke to them, there were really great numbers. The content of the play and George MacLeod's speech was that the church was concerned with the bodies of men as well as with their souls, and that, for that reason, the church was concerned with the preservation of democracy. Apathy in the municipal elections, or in any elections, might easily mean the end of democracy, because the apathetic would have to face the very real possibility of either the Communists or the Fascists getting control of power. I think the message was put over all right, but, in this first stage, it may not have very much effect on the voting which takes place to-day. I'll let you know. In any case, it was great fun. There are certain possibilities in the idea, although a great deal of development would be needed.

Cornwall. Report on the Cornish Religious Drama Festival, April 23rd, 1949.

This was a most successful pioneer event, on which Miss Constance Murray Andrews, as the Prime Mover and Organizer, is to be warmly congratulated. The Festival, which was entirely non-competitive, was held in two sessions in the St. Clement Methodist Youth Club, Truro, on a newly-equipped stage. Seven groups, from widely-scattered parishes, presented their plays before the Commentator, Mrs. Collingwood Selby, the County Drama Adviser, and a mixed audience of members and friends. That the plays were varied will be evident from the following programme :—

The Bishop's Candlesticks, given by Newlyn.
The Devil's Bridge (Gheon), given by St. Ives Arts Club.

Bethlehem, the House of Bread, given by St. Teath.
The Proconsul (Beddow), given by Carbis Bay.
Scenes from "God's Serving Women," given by Camborne.
Scenes from "A Sword Shall Pierce", given by Treslothan.
The Foolishness of God (Collins) given by Truro.

The standard on the whole was not high on the technical side, and it was evident that there is a great deal to learn as regards Stage Décor and the Art of Production. The choice of play was not always happy, one or two of the plays being poorly constructed and lacking in theatre sense. The acting varied considerably, but on the whole it showed promise. The St. Teath entry, produced by the Vicar of the parish, was given by young children, a lovely performance, and extremely well-staged as regards colour and grouping. Miss Murray Andrews herself presented Gheon's charming religious farce, *The Devil's Bridge*, a very good choice. One Act from *The Proconsul* given by Carbis Bay, gripped the audience and made us want to see the whole play.

We all hope that this first Religious Drama Festival in Cornwall will be the precursor of many others, and that they may prove the means of raising standards and establishing valuable contacts between the increasing number of Religious Drama Groups in the County.

Frances M. Collingwood Selby.
County Diocesan Adviser.

ALL THE REST

Northampton. Rare and refreshing it is to be able to write a notice knowing "the play's the thing" without having to worry too much about the manner of the playing.

Such an unusual state of affairs (writes W. E. P.) surrounds the production of *Whither, O Splendid Ship?* a drama of the spiritual life written by the Rev. D. W. Morgan and produced by his son, the Rev. Gerallt Morgan, in St. Giles's Buildings, Northampton, as a worthy and inspiring part of St. Giles's Lenten thinking.

The chief concern about the work is as to its effectiveness as a parable to hold the attention, quicken the imagination, and help direct the thinking.

Can, in fact, justification by faith be played? I think it can, and ought to be, and feel that in this nautical pilgrim's progress Mr. Morgan (whose theology is as sound as his knowledge of the sea and ships and worn as lightly) has made a worthy contribution to active religious drama, a contribution that, rightly used, might well convict and convert.

The play is allegory without tears. Youth begins life's voyage, owner of a proud ship captained by Conscience, with Wiseman as chief officer, Faithful as bo'sun, Trueman as carpenter, Fancy as sailmaker, Moneybags as purser, Appetite as cook, with three apprentices, Love, Fear, and Memory.

Aboard is Old Adam, Hyde to each of our Jekylls to be completely untheological. And this adventure begins and holds the attention through a play of four acts that has a lot of fine things in it and in Act 4, Scene 2, something that makes its point with almost a poetic fervour.

Production was not easy, for the buildings are not too well equipped for dramatic work, though they are no worse than many of the places in which Northampton seeks to produce plays.

The play always was better than the playing; the production had imagination and fortunately the principals (who would benefit from the continuity of a run of several nights) had grasped the meaning of the allegory and on the whole gave it point. There was, however, too much "microphone" voice. Mumbling is popular on the amateur stage. To the cast I say, "Speak up, my hearties, and take a cue from Cap'n Conscience."

This is a religious play requiring a bit of general knowledge of first Christian principles. A short well-spoken prologue would be helpful: for lack of one I suggest " I feel the winds of God to-day " from the Fellowship Hymn Book.

Reading. *The Cup*, an Easter play by Doris M. Gill, was presented on Sunday evening, February 27th, 1949, in Trinity Congregational Church, Reading.

The occasion was the church's final monthly " Rally " service for the winter season, and although *The Cup* had been performed before at Trinity (and reported in *Christian Drama*) this was the first time that a religious play had been presented as part of the evening worship. The " Rally " service is intended as a special effort on the part of the Church to attract non-churchgoers, and the building last Sunday was well-filled, not only with Trinity people, but with a considerable number of strangers. The proceedings took the form of a service with well-known hymns, organ-music, and appropriate readings from St. Mark's Gospel.

The Cup deals, simply and movingly, with the reactions of a few disciples—Peter and John, the Innkeeper, his blind daughter Elisabeth, and his son, Mark, to the happenings in the Upper Room (where all the action takes place) on the night of the Last Supper. The first act takes place immediately prior to, and the second immediately after, the Last Supper, and the final act shows the disciples converted to a glorious belief in the fact of the Resurrection, and all that it implies, the most important point being, of course, the Lordship of Christ.

All who saw the play found it moving and helpful, and many who had doubts about the rightness of such a novel (to them) form of worship were convinced that the experiment was not only a fit manner in which to worship God, but an effective method of evangelization.

St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich. A Panel of Clergy experienced in the production of plays in churches was convened by a secretary of the Church Missionary Council, and it held its first meeting at Diocesan House on Tuesday, March 1st. Activity in this direction was considered by two approaches, either of which seemed practical: viz:—(*a*) by proceeding on a Deanery or Festival basis with a Pageant Play in which a number of parishes would combine, each having separately rehearsed an episode; or (*b*) on a parochial basis, whereby any individual parish could arrange its own play, with local players for local occasions.

A specially experienced Director consented to be made available for co-ordinating a Pageant-Play. A Script-Reader was chosen to advise on plays for individual parishes. Other members of the Committee were qualified to give valuable assistance in production. The Committee, as a whole, contemplates affiliation to the Religious Drama Society. The Rev. H. C. Stableton Cotton of Bradfield Rectory was asked to act as Secretary of the Committee. Application for its assistance should be made to him in the first instance.

C. E. J. H.

Newmarket. St. Mary's Guild of Players presented *Everyman*, a fifteenth-century Play, in St. Mary's Church, Newmarket, on Tuesday, March 15th, at 7.30 p.m.

A dimly-lighted and reverently hushed church with organ music in the background provided the settings for *Everyman*, the famous fifteenth-century Play.

There was a crowded Church. A large stage was built in front of the chancel steps, both the aisles and the chancel were also used for much of the action.

A very high standard of acting was maintained throughout and the play was interpreted with deep feeling and reverence. Many requests have been made for another performance of *Everyman* before the end of the year.

Southampton. Imagine the crazy technique of Olsen and Johnson's *Hellzapoppin* —stage-hands interrupting the action, backchat with the audience and all—applied to

a straight play and you have the style of America's front-rank dramatist, Thornton Wilder. The current production at Southampton's Avenue Hall of his *Our Town* is another outstanding success for the Wayfarers Dramatic Society, and a " must " for theatregoers who can appreciate something out of the ordinary.

The play had been going on for some minutes before most of the audience realized the fact. There is no curtain but the final one and Philip Graham as the " stage manager " has the leading part. From arranging the chairs and tables which form the props he went on to introduce the players, explain things to the audience, and take an odd part here and there.

Theatrical trickery ? Of course, but justified by its success.

Amateur productions of such merit provide welcome oases in the somewhat barren waste which reviewers have to cross in the course of their work. My thanks to Cicely Deverill and the Wayfarers for providing a delightful draught of cool, clear water.

A. B.

Bristol. The production of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in The Cathedral* was a joyous experience for the Guild of Cathedral Players in Bristol Cathedral in January last. The play was presented in the Nave of the Cathedral, and everyone privileged to take part in it realized to the full that a Cathedral, or a Church, with space and height, is surely the right and proper setting for such a play with its immense scope for pageantry and ritual.

The cast was drawn almost entirely from Old Boys of the Cathedral School, or from ex-choristers of the Cathedral. The Women of Canterbury were also connected with the Cathedral in some capacity or other, and to crown all—and with the Guild's lasting gratitude—the part of Beckett was taken by Canon Millbourn, Sub-Dean of the Cathedral. Rehearsals were happy affairs—with a sense of deep communal effort underlying every individual contribution. Memories of the months spent in preparation for the play will be good memories for every member of the cast.

The Guild was honoured on the third night of the production by the presence of the Lord Bishop of Bristol. With him were Mrs. Cockin, one of the Guild's Vice-Presidents, and Miss Pamela Keily. The Bishop pronounced the final Blessing on the large congregation present, and the silence which followed was in itself significant of the deep feeling evoked by the youthful players in their sincere and moving interpretation of this great play.

Glasgow. (Notice from *The National Weekly*, 26th March, 1949.)

The first production in Glasgow Cathedral of any play since the Reformation may well merit attention from those who care to observe how the threads of Scottish life, unravelled at that violent tearing of the broad-cloth, are slowly and laboriously being pieced together by patient hands. In this case credit is due to the Iona Community House Players and Miss Maud Risdon, acting under the direction of Mr. Oliver Marlow Wilkinson for the production of Mrs. Dorothy Walton's play *The Life of Saint Mungo* in the Cathedral on Wednesday and Thursday, 16th and 17th. The music of Dr. Malcolm Bullock admirably recaptured the atmosphere of the early Church, and the sumptuous spectacle of the multitude of costumed players against the austere background of masonry by the light of torch and lamp offered an experience which none who beheld it will easily forget. Difficulties of acoustics, proverbial for the modern voice in such surroundings, were not completely overcome, but crowded audiences seemed delighted with the aesthetic opportunity offered by verse and sound, lit, now dimly and mysteriously, and anon by the glare of torches. The Rev. Nevile Davidson and the Trustees of the Cathedral are to be congratulated on the courage of the innovation.

There was a time when the magistrates of Glasgow had to pass enactments to forbid " the harlotry players " erecting booths against the Cathedral walls in such

numbers as to offer an obstruction—sufficiently remarkable in a country which, some would have us believe, was without drama !

Poplar. We reprint hereunder the actual words of All Saints, Poplar's leaflet announcing the Fourth Annual production of their passion play, because we feel it the best possible statement of the interest it aroused in the neighbourhood:

" All Saints' Church, Poplar. The Fourth Annual production of *The Passion Play*, with a cast of over eighty, Tuesday, March 29th; Wednesday, March 30th; Thursday, March 31st; Friday, April 1st, at 8 p.m.; Saturday, April 2nd, at 6 p.m., in All Saints' Church.

" Doors open at 7.15, Tuesday to Friday, and 5.15 on Saturday. Admission before 7.45, Tuesday to Friday, and 5.45 Saturday is by programme only. Purchase of a programme ensures a seat, but no special seats can be guaranteed.

" No children under fourteen will be admitted without written permission from the Rector.

" Programmes, price 1/-, and permission for children may be obtained from The Rectory, Newby Place, Poplar, E. 14. Buses from Aldgate East, Nos. 40, 15, 23, 665, and 567 pass the door."

Ealing. Quaestors Theatre successfully presented Norman Nicholson's *Prophesy to the Wind*, which was followed by discussion of the production afterwards.

Westminster. The Westminster Catholic Club, St. Georges' Square, S.W. 1, performed during Lent the Club's Passion play, from the programme of which the following is an extract.

" The Westminster Catholic Club. *Ecce Homo*, a meditation on the Passion of Our Lord. Westminster Cathedral Hall. Lent, 1949."

Penistone, Sheffield. During Lent, a few of our parishioners have acted in various local churches, *A House in Capernaum*, written by the Rev. F. Buchanan. This is a religious drama, founded on the calling of Simeon, James, and John to be fishers of men, the actual source being the Gospel of St. Mark. We are shown the conflicting loyalties of the disciples, to Christ on the one hand, and to their families on the other. In some cases Alan Poole's play about Peter's denial of Christ, *This Rock*, was a sequel to *A House in Capernaum*. The last performance was a second presentation of the two plays in our own Parish Church on Good Friday. The style and manner of presentation of the two plays differs greatly, but they have in common the fact that they both depict scenes in the life of Our Lord's disciples, the first at the beginning of His Ministry and the second at the end.

The acting was simple and direct, creating a realistic atmosphere which grew very tense at the climax of each play. The two stories, told thus, in dramatic form, made a vivid impression on the minds of the congregation, who greatly appreciated the presentation. The players and the Vicar are to be congratulated on this successful production, which more than justified their hopes.

Down and Dromore, N. Ireland. Performed *Go Down Moses*, by Philip J. Lamb.

Stroud. From the *Stroud News* :

" On this, the eve of Lent, Stroud congregations are being reminded of God's love and sacrifice for men in a way different from ever before. Some are shocked, some are raised beyond the confines of mortal thought and others are deeply grateful.

" Humbly and conscious of their inadequacy, men and women representatives of the

Christian Churches of the Stroud district are presenting to large congregations at Stroud Parish Church, on each evening of this week, the greatest of all stories—the story of Christ's Passion, in eight scenes, from Dorothy Sayers' *The Man Born to be King*. 'All are unworthy, let none be named,' states the programme. No one takes greater credit than another. Each is giving according to his ability.

"This, the third religious drama, sponsored by the St. Lawrence Scout Group over the past three years, has achieved new heights. The standard demanded by religious plays makes them the most difficult of all the dramatic arts. But nothing transcends the Passion Play. Actors and actresses, several of whom are in the forefront of local amateur dramatics, are playing in this festival as they have never played before.

"Nothing has been spared to make this drama, not an entertainment, but a humble act of devotion as near perfection as possible. Lighting has been carefully and effectively arranged, staging elaborately prepared and the whole enhanced by the beauty of the music of a hidden choir and organ.

"Finally, there remains the solitary symbol of the Christian Faith—the Cross. There it stands all through the final chorale. And there it stands as the congregation leaves the church. Outside will it still be there? For some it will."

Lemington-upon-Tyne. 26th April, 1949.

"We presented the play *In Three Days* on the first four evenings of Holy Week.

"I should like to add that *In Three Days* was greatly appreciated not only by the audiences but also by the players. It is a very fine play (as you've probably been told many times)."

Great Shelford, Cambs. On Passion Sunday, at the close of Evensong, a performance of the fourteenth-century play, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, arranged by E. Martin Browne, was given in the church. It was very moving; the setting of it in the service, with the first Lesson beautifully read from Genesis 22, and a short sermon on the same subject, led up to the solo singing of De Profundis to a simple Plainsong chant and the commencement of the play before the ancient screen.

A single spot-light from the west end was sufficient to give variation and dramatic effect: the church being in darkness, except for the fire carried by Abraham, when the three characters travelled round the aisles to the "mountain high", to the singing of "The Royal Banners forward go", the stage relighting as they came to it.

Bickley and Widmore. The Bickley and Widmore Guild of Players this year presented the Passion Play *In Three Days*. This production fully justified the complete change from the previous dramatic plays with large crowd scenes. The simple but effective scenery and lighting, and the quiet dialogue of the ten players formed a living meditation on the Passion. This was sustained in the intervals between the scenes with fitting and lovely orchestral music. Much was demanded of the players, each of whom entered so truly into his or her part.

The wonderful confidence of Our Lady in the purpose of the Passion and in the promise of the Resurrection was convincingly portrayed. So also were the penitence of Peter, John's perplexity, the joy of Mary Magdalene—and in happy contrast to the more profound aspects of the play—the practical common-sense of Martha.

This quiet, reverent, realistic play was most moving.

Y.W.C.A. North-West Division. *Truth Unchanged*, a festival of Bible Stories and Parables interpreted in a modern setting—was presented at Birkenhead on Saturday, April 2nd, 1949. The Festival was intended as a direct challenge to the statement that the Bible is old-fashioned and no longer applies to our modern way of life.

Eight Y.W.C.A. clubs were invited to choose a Bible story or parable and through the medium of group discussion to write a short scene (lasting not more than 7-10 minutes) applying the teaching of our Lord to modern social conditions.

I visited each of these clubs to begin the first discussions. In some cases it was necessary to suggest an outline, in others they groped for it themselves, but in all cases there was an amazing coherence of thought. It was arranged that all the groups should meet once a week for discussion until such time as they had completed their scene. In most cases the actual script was eventually drafted by one member of the group and again submitted for criticism. As soon as they reached the point where they agreed that the scene was good enough for presentation they sent their scripts to me to be vetted and altered as I thought fit. The results were interesting, especially as many of the members remembered the story they had chosen only as a remote echo of childhood, whilst others were more familiar with their text.

Some of the scenes had very little dramatic value and a superficial understanding of the story, while others held my interest from the beginning. For instance, one group interpreted the parable of " The Workers in the Vineyard " and set their scene in the North of England in 1929, one of the depression years. The stage was divided in half. On the right a working man's kitchen and on the left the factory owner's office. A spotlight descended on the working-man's kitchen, showing his wife busily laying the table for the evening meal and listening intently to the factory buzzer. Her husband has at last got a job after two years of unemployment. The husband rushes in joyously and tells his wife that he has been paid a full week's wage for working only two days. The strawberry jam which the wife had intended as a treat is scorned and she is sent out to buy steak and onions. The husband, left to himself, settles comfortably into a chair to read the evening paper. His peace is momentary and is rudely shattered by the noisy entrance of two of his work-mates who bitterly denounce the owner's action in paying him a full week's wages, and threaten to send a deputation complaining of this injustice. When the argument is at its height the wife re-enters, stands listening to the angry voices and eventually breaks in supporting her husband and orders the men out of her home. There is a momentary black-out and the spotlight moves to the other half of the stage, where the factory owner is discovered dictating to his secretary. They are interrupted by a knock at the door and the secretary announces that there is a deputation from the works demanding to see the owner. The same two men enter and in a more guarded manner complain of the injustice of paying this man a week's money for only two days' work. The owner relates to them very simply the Bible story and explains that had they been out of work for the length of time their colleague had he would have done the same for them. He sends them rather shamefacedly away with " Weep with them that weep and rejoice with them that rejoice ". I did not attempt to alter their conception, as I realized the immense pleasure and experience they had gained in their creations. The alterations were mainly technical.

The next step was to co-ordinate the scenes smoothly and as far as possible artistically. In my next visit, we decided that to establish firmly the identity of the modern scene we should precede it by the relevant tableau in Biblical costume with a Narrator reading from the darkness the original Bible words. During this visit I took the first rehearsals and in some cases found it necessary to alter some of the lines which with action became suddenly stilted.

The performers did their own costume research for the tableaux.

My last visit was a week before the performance, when I again visited the clubs and took a final rehearsal. The groups then met all together for the first time for a Dress Rehearsal on the afternoon of the actual performance.

A choir consisting mainly of schoolchildren began the Festival, singing George Dyson's " Praise " and ended with " Worship ", by Geoffrey Shaw. All the scenes were linked with recorded music.

Despite the fact that in the main I was concerned with the individual experiences of the performers, their enthusiasm and sincerity made a definite impact on the audience.

Enid R. Adams.
Y.W.C.A. Assistant Drama Adviser.

Middlesbrough. From Langbourgh Ridge, Great Ayton, comes the following letter :—

" Dear Sir,

Our performance of Miss Jessie Powell's play *The Fare to Tarshish* (R.D.S.) given last night at Stokesley. I am very pleased to inform you that we were awarded " First ". The two other plays given were Austin Hyde's *Maker of Highway* (dialect), and the play based on Tolstoy's *Where Love is God is*. Our adjudicator has had extensive experience in both producing and taking part in plays in connection with " Little Theatre " work. His name is Mr. J. W. Berriman. He has produced and/or taken part in both the other plays and likes them well. They were well produced and acted. He said that when he first read through Miss Powell's play he thought " what a nerve Mr. Radcliffe has to try to produce such a play ". He thought it would be either a flop or a big success. He said " it was not a flop ". He said it was a difficult play —in verse—no main plot—full of sound stuff—a play where every sentence must be got over. He praised our grouping—every one taking part spoke clearly and deliberately (very necessary)—our team work. His only criticism was that we did not sufficiently emphasize the difference between the Agents and Pilots, the Agents could perhaps have been more seductive. Half-way through the play he was wondering if it was getting over with the audience, when he heard someone behind him say " That 's another one gone to Tarshish ". He knew then that it was getting over. The audience were most attentive, and we could tell we were getting over, and that helped us to our best efforts. He commended our treatment of the " Four Soldiers " incident, and said it provided the requisite lighter touch. He gave us 90 marks out of 100. We were able to borrow a backcloth —used for *Pirates of Penzance*, and it gave a finishing touch.

P.S.—He commended the play in the highest terms, and said it was the kind needed to-day.

Cheddar. Immediately preceding Passion Week, St. Andrew's Players presented a Passion Mime in Cheddar Church. This was a presentation peculiarly their own, as the Biblical narrative was compiled by one of their members, the Rev. A. S. Moody, Director of Religious Education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, and the majority of the costumes for the large cast were made by members and friends. In fact it was a worth-while co-operative effort, with the " sparks " section making a grand contribution.

A little choral speech was introduced, the ladies being given the palm!

Now it is hoped to have Play Readings through the Summer to help in the choice of future productions.

Risca. St. Margaret's Church Players presented *The Way of the Cross*, by Henri Gheon, with tableaux, at St. Margaret's Church Hall on Friday, 8th April, 1949, at 7.30 p.m.

Forthcoming presentation, *Call It a Day*, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 11th, 13th, and 14th May.

Broad Green. *Simon Peter*, by Irene Caudwell. The *Croydon Advertiser* writes :—

What a pity it is that there are so few really good Passion and Nativity plays. There is no more vivid way of bringing home the reality and force of the gospel stories than in dramatic form when these are handled by a good playwright as well as a good Christian (Dorothy Sayers' *Man Born To Be King* is a fine example). All too often, however, in an attempt to be reverent and to be sure that teaching is driven home, the writer of this kind of play puts on to the stage not human beings but mere walking sermons, conveniently dubbed with biblical names, with the result that the thing touches neither heart nor mind. *Simon Peter*, which the Broad Green Fellowship Players presented at

St. Mildred's Church, Addiscombe, on Wednesday last week was something of a defaulter in this respect.

However, the players in this instance extracted all the beauty and drama possible from it. It was intelligently produced, with some good stage pictures; and a notable feature of the production was the expert manner in which the effects were handled. Best of all, the six scenes were blended together with wisely chosen music which echoed the mood, sustained continuity and uplifted the heart. The only general criticism of the performance as a whole was that the play was given at too unvaried a pace, though this was to some extent due to the writing.

Lower Gornal. On the evening of Good Friday, the Drama Group of St. James' Parish Church, Lower Gornal, in the Diocese of Lichfield, presented a Passiontide Play—*In Three Days*.

This, the second religious play performed by the group since their reorganization last year, was a most valuable contribution to the Eastertide devotions, and a large and attentive audience derived much from the production.

After a short introductory service, the anonymous players took the stage.

Incidental music maintained a good effect throughout, and the standard of acting was so high that, at the moment of Peter's realization of Christ's forgiveness, declared to him by the Blessed Mother of our Lord, some of the audience were moved to tears.

The Vicar of St. James' Church, the Rev. R. N. Timms, made the following comment in his Parish Magazine :—

" Surely none who were present will ever forget the depth of sincerity, and the utter reality of religious devotion with which the Players reproduced in such a life-like manner the events of those fateful three days. Perhaps the greatest compliment we can pay them is that throughout the play we forgot the individual names and personalities of the players; so completely were they absorbed in the characters they were playing."

Welwyn Garden City. For your information I am giving below details of the play *Everyman* which was performed by the St. Francis Players at the end of March this year :—

" The St. Francis Players gave performances of *Everyman*, the ancient morality play, in St. Francis Church, Welwyn Garden City, during the last week in March.

" The last and greatest of the English morality plays, it was beautifully and feelingly presented.

" The play was essentially a team effort, and it was acted throughout with great reverence and sincerity. In accordance with custom in this type of play, the names of individual actors and actresses were not revealed on the programme.

" Outstanding features were the superbly moving and highly emotional performance of *Everyman*, the beautifully spoken prologue and epilogue by the ' Doctor ', the clarity and reverence of the Voice of God, and the sincere performances of all the characters, especially those of " Good Deeds " and " Knowledge ".

The above is an extract from an account in a local paper.

Liverpool. The Bishop's Advisory Committee has formed a Drama Group which, with the Bishop's permission, will be known as " The Bishop's Players ".

They are in the middle of their first tour presenting John Drinkwater's play *A Man's House*, in halls, schools, and theatres in the diocese.

R.D.S. NEWS AND NOTICES

The death of Mrs. Olive Stevenson is, indeed, a great loss to all who were privileged to know her. It is owing to her inspiration and initiative, together with that of Sir Francis Younghusband, that the Religious Drama Society was formed. The first meeting was called in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, in February, 1929, when members of the Anglican Church, the Free Churches, and many of the theatrical profession, together with people already presenting religious plays in churches and halls, welcomed the proposal to form a society " to promote the development of Religious Drama ".

Through the various organizations with which she had worked Mrs. Stevenson was in contact with people of very varied outlook. By her gift of friendship she drew together a group which whole-heartedly worked with her in building up the Society.

Mrs. Stevenson believed that Religious Drama should " make men alive to the beauty of holiness ", and set in motion activities to help in the realization of her vision.

After many years of devoted work Mrs. Stevenson's health failed, and she was unable to carry on as secretary to the Society. All those who count themselves happy to be among her friends, rejoice that the work, to which she gave so much of her life, has become a worthy memorial to her.

M. C-H.

R.D.S. and S.P.C.K.

On June 22nd, in accordance with the unanimous voice of the Annual General Meeting of March 25th, a three years' Agreement between R.D.S. and S.P.C.K. was signed by Mr. E. Martin Browne (Chairman of R.D.S. Executive Committee) and Rev. F. N. Davey (Editorial Secretary of S.P.C.K.).

The Agreement, which came into force on July 1st, adheres strictly to the terms of the Draft Proposals which were circulated to all members in February of this year.

What is the Agreement likely to mean, in practice ?

First, it will mean a gradual influx of new members through the exercise of their rights by members of S.P.C.K. It is expected that many such will elect to take advantage of our services which hitherto have been open only to directly subscribing members of R.D.S.

Second, it will mean a strengthening of that co-operation with departments of S.P.C.K. that the R.D.S. staff have for some time enjoyed ; henceforth S.P.C.K. will use R.D.S. as executive agent for the discharge of its responsibility towards the Church of England in the field of religious drama.

Third, it will mean reasonable salaries and a measure of security for the R.D.S. staff, owing to the increased financial assistance from S.P.C.K. It does *not* mean that R.D.S. has no further need to worry about its income from subscriptions and other sources. S.P.C.K., like Heaven, helps those who help themselves . . . and we shall have to redouble our efforts to equip ourselves for many tasks and projects at present beyond our means.

What changes of policy will the Agreement bring ? None whatever.

Will it make R.D.S. an " Anglican " Society ? No. The alterations to the Constitution made by the A.G.M. provide for an Executive Committee of twenty members (to be elected annually as heretofore by the Council) of whom not less than two-thirds shall belong to the Church of England. In the nature of things a Society like R.D.S. is likely to have a fairly large majority of Anglicans among its members ; recent estimates have shown that they form roughly 80 per cent of our total. So a great deal of recruiting from non-Anglican sources must be done before the principle of proportional representation on the Executive Committee can be called in question. R.D.S. Staff and

facilities will continue to be at the disposal of each and every member of whatever denomination. R.D.S. contends that religious drama is an activity in which people of different persuasions can happily co-operate, and it remains free to give what inspiration and help it can wherever it is needed. The Society indeed looks for large numbers of new members from the Roman Catholic Church and the Free Churches, and would welcome greater support and interest from organizations connected with them.

Our deep thanks are due—and were duly expressed by non-Anglican members of our Executive Committee—to the S.P.C.K., and particularly to the Editorial and Financial Secretaries, for devising with us a form of agreement that has commended itself to both Societies. If it is implemented in the same spirit of comradeship, both parties may look for substantial benefits. For our part, we pray that we may be alive to the new demands and opportunities before us, so that when, each year, the working of the scheme is reviewed, we may have further cause for thanksgiving.

" Murder " on Demand

The North London Players, an enterprising group attached to the N.E. London Literary Institute, recently presented *Murder in the Cathedral* (T. S. Eliot) at Dalston County School. This skilful and sensitive production, under the direction of Leslie F. Pitt, L.R.A.M., is being kept " alive " by the company, who will welcome " dates " in Cathedrals, Churches, and halls in the London area from September to the end of the year. A very reasonable inclusive fee is charged to cover expenses. Those interested should apply for full particulars to the Business Manager, Miss N. Harby, 74 Ingleton Road, N. 18 (Tottenham 4489). We recommend this production to our members.

LIBRARY

Plays added to the Library

As it was in the Beginning. Naomi Mitchison and Lewis Gielgud, Jonathan Cape, 3/6, 1939. 14 m., 5 w., 3 acts, 2½ hours. Play revolving around the Christians among the slaves and servants of Roman gentlemen during the persecution of A.D. 64.

Gates of Hell. Joyce Biddell, Highway Press, 2/-, 1949. 13 m., 12 w., 5 angels, parishioners. Choir off-stage. Prologue and Epilogue in High Heaven. 2 acts, 4 scenes. H. Full length. (Fee : £1 1s., 7/6.) " Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The first performances of this play were given at Sheffield at the end of June : a full description will appear in the next number of *Christian Drama.*

Henry Bly. Anne Ridler, Typescript. 4 m., 2 w. A delightfully witty and unusual morality based on Grimm's story *Brother Lustig.*

Little Dry Thorn, Gordon Daviot, Typescript. First performance, 1947. 5 m., 4 w., 2 b., 3 acts. 2000 B.C. The story of Abraham, Sara, and Hagar. First act published as *Sara* in *Leith Sands.* Great dramatic possibilities for advanced groups. Sets for performance may be hired from A. M. Heath & Co., Ltd.

The Pilgrim's Progress. Arr. Rodney Bennett, R.D.S./S.P.C.K., 2/9, 1949. Large cast. 22 sections. Working notes. A complete Dramatization. Bunyan himself introduces the performance and is supposed to be telling the story to a friendly Bedford Gaoler, who develops into one of the characters. In this way continuity is ensured. The author's first intention was to provide something in which a number of R.D.S. groups, etc., could collaborate, the whole being held together by a small group of central characters. A single group can, however, undertake a performance as extensive doubling is practicable. Producers should welcome this version, which gives opportunity for a vigorous and lively presentation.

Satire of the Three Estates, Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, c. 1540, *Scots Review*, 1948, 1/-. Twenty-nine characters, burgesses, singers, 2½ hours. " In condemnation of vertue and vituperation of vyce." Disputation surrounding Rex Humanitas between Diligence and Wantonness : a satire on the corruption of Church and State.

Poison for One. Jessie Powell, Highway Press, 6d., 1949. 4 w., 1 act, 12 mins. An exciting incident in the experiences of Mary Bird in Paris.

Uncle Pao. Harold T. Cook, Metropolitan Missionary Society, 1/6. 4 m., 1 w., 3 lads, 1½ hours. Village near Snahtung in 1930. Influence of the Christian Hospital on Chinese villagers.

Reprints

Joyful Mysteries. A Pageant of the Birth of Christ. Flora Abigail MacLeod, S.P.C.K., 1/-.

The Gladdening Light. An Advent and Christmas Mystery. May O. Pelton, S.P.C.K., 8d.

(All these plays are recommended.)

Reference Library

A Book of Festivals. Diana Carroll, S. French, 2/-, 1949. Suggestions for the Organization of a Drama Festival. This practical little book includes outlines for Nine Festivals, one of which takes the form of a Christmas Carol Service.

Religion through Drama. Michael Sims-Williams, S.C.M. Press Ltd., 8/6, 1949. Dramatic scenes built upon material provided by students. Basic material for five plays.

Text of the Passion Play of Oberammergau, 1910.

Sets

The Pilgrim's Progress. Rodney Bennett.

The Fare to Tarshish. Jessie Powell, R.D.S./S.P.C.K. 1/6. 3 m., 1 w., 6 soldiers, 10 agents and pilots, men and women. Scene : The Harbour of Decision. Theme with Variations : " God never fails to direct, but men do not always listen."

CHRISTIAN DRAMA is the quarterly magazine of the Religious Drama Society. *President*: The Lord Bishop of Chichester. *Chairman of Executive*: E. Martin Browne. *Chairman of Council*: Miss Athene Seyler. *Travelling Adviser*: Miss Carina Robins. *Librarian*: Miss K. Bainbridge-Bell. *Secretary*: T. G. Bartholomew. All enquiries and applications for membership should be addressed to The Secretary, R.D.S., S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, W.C. 2.

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